Negotiating fraternal gender lines in World War I: Ettie Rout, venereal disease, and the female brother

NADIA GUSH

Abstract

During World War I (WWI), Aotearoa/New Zealand’s Ettie Rout notoriously advocated safe brothels and prophylaxis for use amongst New Zealand troops while on leave. Drawing on Derrida’s *The politics of friendship*, alongside works by Carl Schmitt and Wollstonecraft, this article considers the ways in which Rout negotiated the gender lines of WWI to position herself and others as female brothers participating in an allied fraternity at war. To these ends, it considers Rout’s utilisation of the trope of the colonial helpmeet with regard to the spread of venereal disease and the needs of soldiers. It then argues for an understanding of Rout that sees her as necessarily an enemy of the state, a figure consanguineous with the ‘spectre of hostility’ posited by Derrida and Schmitt. It also argues for an appreciation of Rout’s work with prophylaxis and the regulation of prostitutes as a means of positioning prostitutes within the allied fraternity at war, alongside soldiers and also alongside herself as an enfranchised New Zealand woman.

Keywords
Jacques Derrida, fraternity, Ettie Rout, politics of friendship, venereal disease, World War One, prostitution

Introduction

In November 1922, 45 copies of Ettie Rout’s *Safe marriage: A return to sanity* were deemed in breach of New Zealand’s 1910 Indecent Publications Act and seized by local customs officials. The Australian edition of *Safe marriage*, published a little later in 1923, included an appendix headed ‘Suppression of knowledge’ (Rout, 1923, pp. 88–93). In this appendix, Rout (1923) contextualised the particularly vehement opposition to her book expressed by the government of her former homeland, noting that ‘New Zealand may be regarded as peculiarly interesting, as a typical English community rapidly becoming Americanised – destined, perhaps, to be the last home of original Puritanism’ (p. 88). *Safe marriage* included within its covers references to techniques for the control of conception and sexually transmitted diseases, and medical diagrams of human sexual organs. Rout, furthermore, advocated sex for pleasure. Customs officials seized copies of *Safe marriage* because of the book’s sexual frankness. But this was not the first time Rout’s words were erased from the public realm. In 1917, the state placed a ban on Rout’s letters to local newspapers because of her propensity for drawing attention to venereal disease.

Rout, born in Tasmania in 1877 to Catherine Frances McKay and William John Rout, was a shorthand typist and journalist, an entrepreneur beginning her own typing business in 1904, and a socialist active in the New Zealand labour movement from 1907. As Katie Pickles (2016) observes, Rout was part of a small community of radical thinkers living in Christchurch at the turn of the twentieth century. It was during World War I (WWI) while working with New Zealand soldiers abroad that Rout became an outspoken sex reformer...
advocating the use of prophylactics. Building upon existing historiography presenting Rout as controversial because of her progressive attitude towards sex, this article begins to reinterpret the widespread antagonism expressed towards Rout—symbolised in banning letters and seizing books—primarily from the perspective of French theorist Jacques Derrida's (2005) *The politics of friendship*. In so doing, it supplements themes of morality, social purity, and sexual independence to the fore in literature around sex reform, with Derridean paradigms for friendship, the gender of fraternity, and the woman enemy. It also moves beyond the gendered paradigm of the ‘maternal citizen’ who embraces her duty to the state through literal and metaphorical maternal care, and beyond the gendered paradigm of the ‘honorary male’ who transcends female roles to become ‘one of the boys’, to introduce the analytic perspective of the ‘female brother’. Using ‘friendship’ to reframe Rout’s sex reform work with soldiers and prostitutes during WWI enables the article to present Rout’s work as a gendered strategy of female inclusion within what Derrida identifies as the paramount community of friends: the democratic nation–state.

Aotearoa/New Zealand historian Jane Tolerton (1992) produced landmark research into Rout’s life in *Ettie: A life of Ettie Rout*. Documenting the controversy surrounding Rout in this and subsequent texts, Tolerton presented Rout’s position regarding ‘safe sex’ as ahead of its time (Tolerton, 2001, 2016). International historiography concerning sexually candid reformers such as Rout has indicated that such figures could be caught between ideological—and arguably generational—shifts concerning the perceived nature of woman as a sexual and moral subject. As Lucy Bland (1990), Emma Liggins (2007, 2012), and Janet Lee (2011) demonstrate, on one side of the divide the ‘Victorian’ social purist continued to fight against the sexual double standard apparent in prostitution, encouraging a model for womanhood premised on spiritual purity and sexual chastity. On the other side stood the ‘modern New Woman’, embracing female sexual autonomy, agency, and desire. Sex reformers often shared the same networks as social purists, while advocating for the sexual agency aligned with the New Woman. Because sexual autonomy and ‘safe sex’ eventually became mainstays in the feminist movement, such views and the women who enunciated them can appear as particularly progressive. Beryl Satter’s (1999) research traces the developments that enabled members of the American New Thought movement to move from a social purity perspective on sexual desire as indicated in the writings of New Thinkers Helen Van-Anderson and Ursula Gestefeld, to an increasingly positive attitude towards sexual desire as evidenced in the writings of New Thinker Alice Bunker Stockham. Like Rout, pro-desire writers prominent in the later years of the New Thought movement, Stockham and Helen Wilmans, were silenced in their positive depiction of female sexual desire (Satter, 1999). Stockham was arrested for sending ‘improper’ material relating to marital sexuality through the mail in 1905, resulting in a fine and a ban on her books (Satter, 1999). Lucy Bland (2008) similarly demonstrates how female desire and sexual agency could result in ‘punishment’ with regard to Edith Thompson and a 1923 court case concerning her husband’s murder. As Bland (2008) notes, ‘Edith was on trial not just for murder but arguably also for being modern, consuming mass culture, seeking sensation, and above all exerting sexual agency’ (p. 632). In this instance, Thompson’s status as a New Woman with sexual agency became plain when sexually candid letters she wrote to her lover were produced in court (Bland, 2008). This article acknowledges that Rout experienced backlash because she championed ‘safe sex’ against a dominant regime of social purity insistent on female sexual modesty. It also moves beyond this interpretation, contributing to the historiography of sex reform and women’s activism during this period by considering Rout’s silencing in 1917 and 1923 from the perspective of the politics of friendship. As such, it aligns with work by Janet Lee (2007, 2008) on women’s participation in war and also draws on
Derrida’s (2005) *The politics of friendship* to bring the gender of fraternity during WWI to the fore in the analysis.

Interested in friendship as a political structure, in two of his less well known texts Derrida (1993, 2005) traced the historical transmission of ‘friendship’ between theorists extending from Aristotle to Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Carl Schmitt, among others. In so doing, Derrida demonstrated (a) that a hegemonic paradigm for democracy exists and (b) that this paradigm rests on a particular primary enduring model for friendship. As feminists might expect, Derrida found that the enduring model for friendship at the heart of democracy is prefigured upon the friendship shared between a pair of men who relate to each other as if they were brothers. In turn, Derrida (2005) was able to demonstrate that friendship, extrapolated into fraternity, and extrapolated into democracy, is intrinsically and universally male. Women, who are omitted from this paradigm, exist primarily as discursive enemies to friendship and the democratic nation–state alike (Derrida, 2005). This article thus draws on Derrida (1993, 2005) to reinterpret Rout’s threat to social and sexual norms in terms of the threat posed to normative male fraternity by the complex figure of the ‘female brother’, the woman who befriends within a community of brothers, or, fraternity. This article argues that Rout negotiated the intrinsically masculine gender of fraternity by participating in WWI. It argues that Rout took up space as a Derridean female brother acting as an ally to sexually active soldiers. It also argues that Rout’s work with sex reform implicitly elevated prostitutes from fallen women to fellow—or also qualitatively distinct—female brothers unabashedly participating in the political community as friends to New Zealand soldiers. This was made possible by making sex with prostitutes ‘safe’. The article begins by reflecting on the tensions between Rout, the military, and local feminists who were vocal at the time, to explore the social purity context of Rout’s work with venereal disease during WWI. It then looks to a selection of thinkers concerned with the politics of friendship—including Jacques Derrida and Carl Schmitt—to consider the ways in which Rout and the prostitutes she made safe activated paradigms for friendship despite being women. Derrida (1993, 2005) posits that women become a necessary exclusion from the models of friendship from which paradigms for democracy are extrapolated. As such, the article considers the ways in which Rout came to symbolise the archetypal female enemy due to her friendship with soldiers. It locates Rout as a ‘spectre of hostility’ ritually silenced to reinforce the solidarity of the male brother in arms during WWI and the years immediately beyond (Derrida, 2005, p. 157). While diagrams of human sexual organs and the advocacy of sex for pleasure were clearly confronting prospects for many interwar New Zealanders, it is the contention of this article that there was more to the suppression of *Safe marriage* than its contents alone. Inhabiting the space of the female brother by extending her friendship to New Zealand soldiers, Rout was construed as a spectre of hostility from her involvement in WWI onwards, where the particularly stringent interwar ban on her work acted as a re-inscription of her status as political enemy.

**Social purity feminists, venereal disease, and World War I**

While in some instances social purity feminists and sex reformers shared sympathies, as Lesley Hall (2004) has shown, Rout could be particularly outspoken in her opposition towards social purity feminism. This oppositional tendency predated her involvement with soldiers. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, social purity had become directly aligned with suffrage feminism in the later nineteenth century. While many arguments were put forward locally for female enfranchisement, as Patricia Grimshaw’s (1987) work has indicated, there was also a clear relationship between social purity and suffrage feminism during the later 1880s and 1890s that
contributed to the eventual granting of female suffrage in 1893. This was in part due to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union—an international organisation nominally concerned with the liquor trade and the negative impact of male drinking upon women and children—acting as a driving force behind the Aotearoa/New Zealand suffrage campaign. The relationship between social purity and suffrage feminism was also apparent in the readiness with which New Zealanders would accept that women were figures of morality whose participation in politics through suffrage would invariably lead to a more moral and just nation–state (Dalziel, 1986; Grimshaw, 1987). The idea that men were naturally inclined towards vice in terms of animalistic self-interest symbolised in alcoholism and sexual promiscuity, while women were not, was a core principle of social purity feminism. It was also a principle with which Rout generally did not agree. Rout’s response to visiting English suffragettes in 1913 demonstrates both the intensity with which social purity and suffrage feminism were aligned in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the intensity with which Rout disagreed when it came to the presumed qualitative difference with regard to morality and justness between the sexes. This disregard for moral difference continued to be apparent in Rout’s work with venereal disease and New Zealand soldiers.

Rout was sufficiently critical of social purity feminists in Aotearoa/New Zealand that the Auckland Women’s Political League accused Rout of being ‘anti-feminist’ in 1913 (Tolerton, 1992, p. 92). While Rout was early to adopt trousers and abandon corsets, demonstrating her feminism in practical ways, she was also quick to denounce the importance of female suffrage. This was partly due to the perceived ineffectiveness of female participation in local politics at that time, and partly on social purity grounds. In 1913, Aotearoa/New Zealand received two visiting suffragettes from England, where the female vote was not yet secured, Miss Newcombe and Miss Hodge. While the pair met with leading local feminists to gain insight and inspiration to utilise in the fight for female suffrage in their own country, Rout made a point of disillusioning the pair with regard to the supposed positive impact of female suffrage in Aotearoa/New Zealand. While in Christchurch, the visitors were derisively informed by Rout that female suffrage had brought ‘a blighting mildew of “Wowserism” over the democratic movement’ (Rout, 1913). She continued, noting that since enfranchisement, the ‘Conservative Party has been “using” the women it can command for demi-semi-political purposes, taking care to stress the “social” side of their usefulness, and heading them off gently but firmly from quarters and offices where they might be likely to do “mischief”’ (Rout, 1913). As a socialist, Rout believed suffrage was a useful step towards the elevation of the woman worker, and conceded that making women explicitly equal citizens was advantageous in a general sense (Tolerton, 1992, p. 85). However, arguing against the aspirations of the social purist, Rout asserted that women reformers continued to act abominably in the name of justice and that men continued to act sensibly. This was in spite of assumptions held by suffrage and temperance feminists that the female vote would lead to a ‘new heaven on earth’ or a ‘great social, moral or political revolution’ by bringing female purity to the public sphere (Rout, 1913). Moreover, for Rout, female suffrage was merely part of the wider growth in humanitarianism taking shape internationally, best understood, like manhood suffrage, as ‘only the gateway to the dawn’ (Rout, 1913). Principles of social purity feminism also impacted on attitudes towards the control of venereal disease from the late nineteenth century onwards. Rout continued to discredit the usefulness of assumptions concerning female purity and male vice through her work with soldiers and venereal disease. As such, Rout and other prominent local feminists remained in opposition to one another when it came to renewed debates concerning the regulation of vice during WW1. It is this to which the article now turns.
Rout had failed to secure state support for her participation in WWI, and, scandalously, she left Aotearoa/New Zealand to head for New Zealand troops in Cairo, Egypt, in 1915. She was accompanied by a handful of women similarly unhappy with their exclusion from the war effort, dubbed the New Zealand Volunteer Sisterhood. Committed to a degree of biological determinism, Rout justified her recruitment of women for war work abroad on the grounds that men needed women to cook and care for them whether they were soldiers or civilians. As Rout noted in correspondence, ‘The human care of men, sick and well, has been our job for millions of years …’ (Tolerton, 2001, p. 78). In drawing up her plan for the Volunteer Sisterhood, Rout had decided to recruit women between the ages of 35 and 40, preferably without children (Tolerton, 1992). However, arriving in Egypt in February 1916, Rout realised the biggest issue facing New Zealand soldiers was not the absence of colonial women tending their wounds and baking their puddings. Instead, Rout was alerted to the numbers of soldiers infected by venereal diseases, presumably (although not necessarily) caught from the women who were already there.

Venereal disease, the military, and legislation designed to manage the sexual relations of soldiers and prostitutes feature prominently in the history of Britain and her former Empire. This dates from at least the 1860s, where legislation was in place in garrison and port towns in the United Kingdom (Levine, 2003). In 1864, the United Kingdom passed the first of three Contagious Diseases Acts, which were formed through the recommendations of a committee established to assess venereal diseases amongst the armed forces. It was within the scope of the Act for women suspected of prostitution within port and garrison towns to be arrested and to undergo a compulsory check for venereal disease. In 1886, after many years of controversy and debate, the Contagious Diseases Acts were repealed. Within the British world, comparable measures had been implemented to curb the spread of venereal disease during the 1860s in Hong Kong, Gibraltar, Malta, Australia, and India (Levine, 1994). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Contagious Diseases Acts were in effect from 1869 to 1910, although they were only brought into operation in two regions, Auckland and Canterbury. While the New Zealand Act imitated the British legislation, as Charlotte Macdonald has demonstrated, local legislation was intended to control prostitutes rather than venereal disease (Macdonald, 1986).

According to Philippa Levine (2003), debates surrounding venereal disease within the wider British world tell us about ‘British colonialism and the culturally specific assumptions on which it rested’ as much as they do the soldiers and prostitutes responsible for the spread of disease (p. 2). Levine demonstrates that the control of venereal disease was linked to modernity, Britishness, masculinity, and consequently to national and imperial identities. As such, high rates of venereal infection during WWI threatened national legitimacy for New Zealanders as colonial British, at a time when venereal disease was still associated with the degeneracy of ‘primitive’ races, and its successful medical treatment the sign of White medical rationality and modernity (Levine, 2003). Venereal disease was also, in the case of Aotearoa/New Zealand, symptomatic of old world ills—the degenerative effects of industrialisation and poverty from which New Zealanders believed their nation had escaped (Fleming, 1989). As such, imperialism and colonialism alike were aligned with the illusion of morally strong White men able to withstand the advances of corrupt women.

While the Contagious Diseases Acts were repealed in 1910, WWI prompted renewed attention to the spread of venereal disease and the possible regulation of prostitution. In 1916, a War Regulations Bill was brought into force in Aotearoa/New Zealand; in its early readings, it sought to limit the spread of venereal disease. Statistics available for recruits at Featherston and Trentham military training camps indicated that venereal disease was rife, and the state was quick to again look to the regulation of prostitution as a possible means to curb the spread of disease (Tulloch, 1997). When the War Regulations Amendment Bill was read in Parliament
in 1916, women were removed from the gallery to protect female sensibilities (Fleming, 1989). While the 1916 Bill did not, in its final form, include clauses specifically relating to venereal disease, the issue again came before the New Zealand Government in 1917, this time in reference to the troops that were now serving in Egypt, France, and London (Tulloch, 1997). In 1917, Colonel Rhodes raised the issue of venereal disease with regard to the first expeditionary force in a report to the Minister of Defence (Fleming, 1989). When the report was made public, the reference was removed for fear of making New Zealand soldiers appear immoral.

The army similarly negotiated perceptions of morality when it attempted to manage venereal disease abroad. When New Zealand men arrived in Egypt, General Godley attempted to stem the growing tide of sexual experimentation on the part of young soldiers through the use of moral prophylaxis. In an attempt to keep men out of the way of prostitutes, he provided an alternative venue for soldiers to consume beer in a wet canteen (Tolerton, 1992). He also took his men to see the dirty and distasteful areas in which prostitutes worked in daylight, in the hope of discouraging men from attending after dark (Tolerton, 1992). General Godley also made urethral irrigation available for those who did engage in sexual activity, a form of early treatment against venereal infection. When Godley later ordered 5,000 tins of ‘Metchinoff’s’ ointment for use prior to sexual encounters, he came under criticism from senior medical officer P. C. Fenwick (Tolerton, 1992), who perceived this as the encouragement of vice and believed it would be impossible to get the men to use it. As it happened, Godley’s men sold the ointment on, in part because prostitutes were inclined to refuse to participate in sexual activity after the ointment was applied, as it could result in blistering (Tolerton, 1992).

Rout’s approach to the venereal disease problem was two-fold. She wanted soldiers to protect themselves from infection, and she wanted brothels to be made safe for use through regulation. British troops in India during the later nineteenth century had benefitted from a quota of prostitutes in ‘red bazaars’, who were regularly inspected and treated for disease (Levine, 1994, 2003). But this did not mean that Rout’s proposal was without controversy or resistance. Following the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, few were prepared to publicly promote the regulation of prostitution. Rout began to forcefully advocate for prophylactics in 1917, and agitated for safe brothels in 1918. She also set up canteens in the desert for mounted troops in the Sinai–Palestine campaign after most New Zealanders had moved on to France (Tolerton, 2001). The canteens provided copious amounts of fruit salad as a source of vitamins. Aware of high rates of venereal disease amongst troops in Egypt, military officials hoped rates would drop once soldiers began taking leave in Britain; however, this did not happen. In response to the growing problem, Rout moved to London in early 1917 to push for the dissemination of condoms and ointments amongst troops. To these ends, Rout consulted with leaders in the field and constructed a prophylactic kit containing Condy’s Crystals, disinfectant, thick condoms, and calomel ointment (Tolerton, 2001). When the army refused to adopt her kits, she set up a base in Hornchurch from which she could disseminate them herself. Regulating vice in the form of safe brothels was illegal in Britain but possible in France, where the New Zealand troops were on leave by 1919. Rout identified Madame Yvonne’s brothel as amenable to her safe sex campaign and began to hand out publicity ephemera to New Zealand troops at the train platform of the Gare du Nord that singled out the brothel as the site of choice for safe sex while on leave. She also checked that each soldier had a prophylactic kit, a version of which had by then been adopted by the military for dissemination as a result of her lobbying. In accordance with the British Venereal Diseases Act 1917, which stipulated that advertisements for the cure of venereal diseases were forbidden, no instructions for use were included.

While women’s organisations in Aotearoa/New Zealand marshalled the principles of social purity and eugenics to call for the removal of ‘sexual degenerates’ to farm colonies, the
introduction of women police, free clinics, prohibition, and education in sex hygiene, Rout advocated from abroad for officially sanctioned brothels and the dissemination of prophylactics (Fleming, 1989). This resulted in Rout’s work for sex reform being denounced by significant Aotearoa/New Zealand women’s organisations during the war. For example, on hearing of Rout’s work in 1918, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union declared its ‘utter abhorrence at the effrontery of Miss Ettie Rout, in implying that the New Zealand boys must be supplied with remedies to make wrong-doing safe, and sin easy’. Furthermore, the organisation placed on record its ‘emphatic repudiation of the use of prophylactics and of the woman who advocates them’ (“Utter Abhorrence”, 1918). In addition, Rout was accused by the Union of supporting the White slave trade (Dalley, 2007). It was against this backdrop that Rout’s letters to local newspapers were banned, a ban that was put in place in 1917 under War Regulations. William Massey, the then Prime Minister of Aotearoa/New Zealand, concurred in silencing the venereal disease messenger, announcing ‘[i]f I had my way with Miss Rout’s correspondence, I would have her letters burned by the common hangman’ (Massey as cited in Tolerton, 1992, p. 169). It was not a given that material concerning venereal disease and prophylactics would be banned from publication locally. In 1918, an advertisement for ‘Prophylactic Outfits for Men’ was approved for publication. The Solicitor-General explained how there was to be no objection to such advertisements as long as they were ‘worded with decent reticence’ (Commissioner of Police to Chief Health Officer, as cited in Fleming, 1989, p. 153). As Gibson (2001) has noted, it was preferable for the public to believe that British and Dominion soldiers were ‘non-sexual beings’, and, as such, venereal disease as it related to soldiers was a much more controversial issue (p. 541).

In 1919, Rout was awarded the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française (French Medal of Recognition) by the French in acknowledgement of her work for sexual health with soldiers and brothels and in recognition of the humanitarian work she undertook in the Somme after the close of the war, feeding children at an American Red Cross station. Conversely, the Aotearoa/New Zealand ban on information regarding Rout put in place during WWI was informally extended. As Tolerton (2001) notes, while Australian war histories mention Rout in passing, she and her more conventional work with the Volunteer Sisterhood were omitted from Aotearoa/New Zealand histories altogether. As outlined earlier, research by Tolerton (2001), Satter (1999), and Bland (2008) indicated that Rout’s disinclination to toe the social purist’s line resulted in her omission from such narratives as a sort of communal punishment. However, behind Rout’s push for physical prophylaxis and safe brothels was the shadow of an equally controversial shifting paradigm for fraternity that included women. This article now draws on the work of Carl Schmitt and Jacques Derrida, among others, to first consider the complex ways in which Rout and others negotiated the political possibility of the female brother herself and, second, to consider the way in which Rout’s advocacy of ‘safe sex’ enabled the prostitutes she favoured to also inhabit space as female brothers. The article also considers the double bind of the female friend, who is also ontologically positioned as simultaneous enemy.

**Female brothers**

The female brother is, as Derrida (1993, 2005) explains, a figure whose friendship through marriage or sisterhood participates in the community of political brothers but whose presence is a necessary but external discourse to the brotherhood of democracy. This might suggest that the female brother exists as an ‘honorary male’, legitimised in her legal or biological attachment to the brother rather than in her own right. However, just as Derrida speaks of the brother as a friend who behaves as if he were immediate family, the female brother is similarly
defined by the discursive quality of her friendship and not by a biological or legal relationship to others. Moreover, because she exists outside of the texts that Derrida consults, she exists as a hypothesis. Of Nietzsche, who speaks of the gender-neutral male in his book, Human, all too human, Derrida asks, ‘what is a friend in the feminine, and who, in the feminine, is her friend?’ (2005, p. 56). It is thus possible to interpret Rout and other women who positioned themselves within military fraternities during WWI as the potential Derridean ‘friend in the feminine’ or female brother.

Consistent with Derrida’s (1993, 2005) observations regarding the genealogy of friendships and the discursively masculine gender of fraternity, for many commentators active in the 1890s–1920s it was unclear whether women were capable of the kind of political friendship believed to be modelled by men and, as such, it was unclear whether women were capable of participating fully in the political nation–state. Liggins (2007) provides insights into this aspect of gendered debate, noting that Eva Anstruther, for example, contributed an article to the Nineteenth century in 1899 where Anstruther claimed that ‘woman is not clubbable and never will be,’ as her ‘lack of [comradeship]’ sometimes gives ladies clubs the impression of empty shells’ (p. 228). Without ‘clubbability’, woman was incapable of the kind of friendship that suited her for politics or positioned her for war. One of the original feminist theorists in the Western world, Mary Wollstonecraft, early surmised that female friendship (let alone fraternity) was impossible. However, Wollstonecraft perceived this to be the result of restrictions placed upon women that left them in a subservient position, particularly with regard to marriage. For example, for Wollstonecraft, friendship within marriage resulted in an exchange of labour between individuals, and friendship was not possible within a framework corrupted by what Frazer (2008) refers to as ‘dependence and resentment, by servitude and tyranny, by commercial exchanges, especially the commercial exchange of marriage’ (p. 251). While erotic lovers came under the umbrella of Aristotelian philia for Wollstonecraft, contractual exchanges or commercial treaties lay outside of friendship (Frazer, 2008). Moreover, even for Wollstonecraft, friendship was posited as being uniquely aligned with the relationships permitted between brothers in arms rather than those between man and woman. This was clearly an opinion that persisted into the 1910s, where women were perceived as only capable of domestic friendships rather than a fraternal paradigm resulting in comradery with political importance (Rowbothom, 1997, as cited in Lee, 2008). Arguably in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the communitarian politics and mixed-sex communal living embraced by Christchurch radical—and close friend of Rout—Professor Alexander Bickerton contributed to Rout’s understanding of a brotherhood of man that could include women as brothers (Pickles, 2016).

WWI, in part, began to change the perception that British women were unclubbable, where ‘Jesse’ could, by 1916, claim that it was now generally accepted that women could work alongside men and, moreover, alongside other women (Lee, 2008). But this was not without a degree of effort on the part of women seeking acceptance into fraternal spaces. Janet Lee (2007) notes that women of FANY, the British First Aid Nursing Yeomanry, negotiated existing gender norms to position themselves as nonthreatening female brothers during WWI. Lee argues that this was partly due to their ability to emphasise themselves as fun-loving glamorous ladies, retaining their prestige as members of the social elite even while nursing wounded soldiers. This gendered performance of class gave FANY nurses permission to transgress the norms that otherwise positioned women outside of battlefields (Lee, 2007). In this instance, class privilege appears to have countered the gender of the brother. However, class privilege was an unlikely ally for a New Zealander such as Rout, given that Aotearoa/New Zealand had built its image of democracy on egalitarianism. Instead, as an aid to acceptance, Rout chose a trope more suited to the enfranchised women of a White settler colony: the colonial helpmeet. It was she whom
Rout invoked in the assertion that, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, a woman’s job was to cook and care for the nation’s men whether they were at home or abroad. The helpmeet was also a ‘jack of all trades’ befitting the colonial environment. This was a gendered paradigm that local feminist Anna Stout referred to as ‘true comradeship’ with men, in 1910 (Stout, 1910, p. 7). Members of FANY invoked a ‘pure comradeship’ with regard to their own work. Beryl Hutchinson explained how one of the best parts of her work with FANY was the comradeship experienced between ‘every man, woman, senior General, to FANY Bugler . . .’ (Hutchinson as cited in Lee, 2008, p. 26). Linking into popularised understandings of maternal citizenship associated in part with the growing field of eugenics and in part with ideals for female friendships, Rout also publicised the work of her Volunteer Sisterhood in terms of a ‘universal motherhood’ (Tolerton, 1992, p. 102). Rout may well have been aware that American Eliza Burt Gamble had posited maternal affection as a model for the ‘Utopian dream of the brotherhood of man’ in her 1901 article, ‘The Influence of Sex on Development’ (Satter, 1999, p. 12).

The women of FANY succeeded in negotiating a space for themselves within the fraternal community of brothers in arms during WWI through evoking class privilege in their constructions of gender. As the volatility with which Rout was met by fellow New Zealanders at home attests, Rout was not as successful in the justification for her own presence as female brother. New Zealanders were not prepared to swallow the proposition that the colonial helpmeet’s job on the warfront was to procure prostitutes for the troops. New Zealand women also faced the additional tension of having won the vote on the grounds of the colonial helpmeet and her perceived social purifying effects. The last thing Aotearoa/New Zealand, or other English-speaking nations where female suffrage remained a moot point, needed was an enfranchised woman performing her gendered duty to enable sexual vice. Moreover, Rout’s nominal enfranchisement within her home country is also what made her qualitatively different from FANY women with regard to her position as a female brother. As an enfranchised woman, Rout was already positioned as a hypothetical brother within a polis. This meant Rout’s presence as a friend to the troops was necessarily more politically acute. As such, the destabilising effect associated with Rout as female brother was also more acute. Responding to nineteenth century French historian Jules Michelet’s perception of women and friendship, Derrida (2005) spoke to the discursive impossibility of the true ‘friend in the feminine’, or female brother, explaining,

Woman is like absolute fraternity, she resembles it, like law beyond law, justice beyond justice. She is ‘more than just’. Except for the fact that she destroys, with justice, what she thus is, what she could be, what she is without being it: pure friendship (p. 239).

As a destroyer of friendship, the female brother is always already the enemy of fraternity; the enemy of democracy. As Derrida (2005) and Schmitt (2007) note, the paradigm for the enemy is as significant to democracy as is the paradigm of the friend. The article now considers the way in which prostitutes were figured as enemies by contemporaries during WWI, interpreting the significance of the prostitute as female enemy, and also the significance of Rout’s work with prophylactics as a means of elevating the relationship between soldiers and prostitutes to that of a fraternal paradigm.

The female brother as enemy

As historians such as Levine (2003) assert, while New Zealanders may have ostensibly been at war with Germany from 1914 to 1918, venereal disease and the women perceived to spread it were a close second. Such women were most often subjects of allied rather than enemy nations,
complicating the otherwise clear demarcation between friend and enemy for soldiers and those with responsibility for their wellbeing. During WWI, prostitutes were posited as falling into two camps: the professional and the amateur prostitute. Amateur prostitutes were often identified as posing the biggest threat to soldiers, as authorities believed such women were more likely to be infected with communicable diseases. Rout referred to amateur prostitutes in England, who were inclined to accost Australian and New Zealand soldiers because they had more money, as ‘the Irresponsible Flapper[s]’ (Tolerton, 1992, p. 149). Irresponsible flappers were blamed for 70% of the venereal disease contracted by soldiers while in London (Tolerton, 1992). In their concern with domestic prostitution and venereal disease, the New Zealand Government similarly increasingly focussed its attention on the ‘amateur’ or ‘novice’ prostitute, she whom may have sex with men outside of wedlock but did not work in a brothel, and may not have charged for the service. As Dr Daisy Platts-Mills explained it in 1917, the biggest threat to manhood was not the public prostitute ‘who are usually sterile’ but the ‘young girls of the “respectable” section of society, to whom we look as the future mothers of the race’ (Platts-Mills as cited in Tulloch, 1997, p. 236). During the war, there was a perception that French women willing to have sex with billeted British soldiers were riddled with disease, although there are accounts from soldiers to suggest that prophylactics were available in their billeted homes but not in urban brothels (Gibson, 2001).

Sexually active women were perceived to be such a threat to the stability of the war effort by 1918 that Britain introduced a Defence of the Realm Act specifically identifying women as potential ‘disloyal conduits of sexual infection’ (Levine, 2003, p. 162). Regulation 40D made it an offence for a woman with venereal disease to infect a member of the British Armed Forces. Jovana Knezevic (2011) similarly shows how female sexuality became a battleground for Habsberg-occupied Serbia, where women who had sex with the conquering enemy posed both a moral and a national dilemma. As Levine’s (2003) work demonstrates, British soldiers were described as being at risk from prostitutes who might seduce vulnerable young men and also from the female reformers speaking against regulation and prophylactic prevention of disease. Little, if anything, was said about women who were at risk of rape or infection from soldiers. Furthermore, the spectre of the female seductress performing her gendered inferiority on the streets of London or Paris in ways that were perceived as a predatory threat to young men was already positioned outside of friendship in the writings of Wollstonecraft (Frazer, 2008). Friendship required equality and honesty between parties, which did not exist when women performed heterosexual flirtation to solicit the attentions of male suitors. As such, the discourse surrounding the novice prostitute and her threat to young soldiers automatically worked to police the boundaries of soldierly fraternity. The amateur prostitute’s performative pretences removed her as potential friend. But Wollstonecraft wrote at a time when women had yet to be accorded legal status as citizens with rights. By the 1910s, New Zealand women were able to vote in national elections and were no longer the legal chattels of their husbands upon marriage, a vote and shift in the legislature that positioned women as hypothetical comrades alongside men, discursively changing women’s potential for political friendship, as Rout was aware.

Despite the perceived threats posed to soldiers by sexually enticing women, soldier fraternity was also understood as being strengthened by the culture of the brothel. While women, indigenous populations, and – in some cases – Chinese and indentured Island labourers contributed to the early successes of Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand as White settler nation–states, both countries elevated the endeavours of White men in breaking in virgin land and establishing colonial order. In Australia, this was a narrative of ‘masculinity beating the odds’ (Levine, 2003, p. 259). In both countries, this fraternal narrative of men working together became an enduring paradigm for colonial community. WWI brothel culture
inherited this ethos of colonial mateship, where participants and regulators alike construed visiting a brothel more as an example of male bonding than an individualised sexual encounter. Arguably, group rape served the same purpose, but without the extension of fraternity to the victim. Moreover, for the soldiers who contracted venereal disease during WWII, discovering symptoms of infection could become a rite of passage (Kampf, 2008). For the military, the group spirit of brothel attendance and the brotherhood of drinking and teasing were preferable to the solitary act of masturbation (Levine, 2003). Because brothels maintained fraternity for soldiers in this way, the potentially infectious prostitute can be seen as a potential Derridean female brother, simultaneously friend and enemy to the polis.

In attempting to remove the issue of venereal disease by advocating prophylactics and safe brothels, Rout attempted to remove what can be understood to be one of the discursive barriers keeping prostitutes from participating effectively within a fraternal paradigm. Discussing Cicero and Montaigne’s ‘citizen couples’, Derrida (2005) explains,

> these citizens are men whose *virile virtue* naturally tends, however successful or unsuccessful the attempt, to the harmonisation of the measure of friendship – unconditional union or affection – with the equally imperative reason of the State (p. 184).

As such, the friendships maintaining soldier–prostitute relationships were poor friendships in that their outcome literally affected the imperatives of the state, not in a moral sense alone, but with regard to the ineffective soldier suffering syphilis and other venereal diseases. The potential for heterosexual fraternity resulting in women’s inclusion in the community of brothers in this context is troubled by her discursive loci as a site of disease, both bodily and moral, and in some instances as immigrant. However, while a *spousal* relationship between soldiers and prostitutes would have evoked Aristotle’s aristocratic relationship, one that is not truly fraternal or ‘political’, by entering into a capitalist exchange of or for pleasure, the friendship between prostitutes and soldiers was in many ways recognizably fraternal (Derrida, 2005). In encouraging prostitutes to monitor their sexual health, Rout elevated the soldier–prostitute relation to a paradigm more reflective of the ‘citizen couple’. In imploring ‘boulevard girls’ in Paris to ‘REMEMBER that if you have disease, not only are you doing yourself serious harm … YOU ARE HELPING THE ENEMY by rendering men unfit to fight’, Rout worked to position the prostitute as female friend (Rout as cited in Tolerton, 1992, p. 178). It is this, the radical nature of safe sex with regard to discourses of fraternity, that is overlooked in historiography that emphasises the incongruent social purity context of Rout’s sexual reform work. Not even the temporary, infrequent nature of prostitute–soldier relationships differentiate them from the political friendships that constitute the brotherhood of soldiers once venereal disease is removed, as soldiers too endured friendships of short nature with other men while at war. It is rather the discourse of brotherhood, political friendship, and the need of the polis for domestic enemies that removes women as contenders for full participation—irrespective of their infectiousness—not the particularities of their participation, as we shall see.

**Annulling friendships and expelling enemies**

Carl Schmitt’s works are invariably shaped by the historical context of 1920s Germany and his position as a law professor associated with Nazi politics. Key aspects of *The concept of the political*, originally presented as a series of lectures in May 1927, are derived from critical responses to the actions of the League of Nations. The League’s imposition of economic sanctions on Germany following WW1 manifest as Schmitt’s paradigm of modern warfare, for example. However, as Timothy Nunan notes, the focus of Schmitt’s (2011) work is useful
irrespective of the unsavoury context of its creation, identifying Schmitt’s exposure of the
denationalisation of war as pertinent to more recent situations concerning Al-Qaeda and the
Taliban. Schmitt’s work is also useful in that it can provide insight into the ways in which
states work to mask, eliminate, and obscure their enemies. For Schmitt, ‘As long as the state is
a political entity [the] requirement for internal peace compels it in critical situations to decide
also upon its domestic enemy’, defining a political entity as ‘internally peaceful, territorially
enclosed, and impenetrable to aliens’ (Schmitt, 2007, pp. 46–7). While Aotearoa/New Zealand
as a territorially enclosed state was not directly exposed to attack from political enemies during
WWI, by sending soldiers abroad, the political state was extended beyond the country’s shores,
participating in a British alliance in arms. While this participation was within an apparently
clear-cut definition of friends and enemies, it also created a situation where Aotearoa/New
Zealand was not territorially enclosed and as such was not impenetrable to aliens. The New
Zealand male body extended the state beyond the Pacific, differently to the ways in which
the European male body extended or defended European borders. The male body became the
liminal extension of the New Zealand state, requiring its own personal impenetrability to the
equally unclear category of enemy. While for Schmitt individuals are not political enemies of
one another, to the extent that the male soldier extended the New Zealand state through his
corporeality, the soldier’s relationship to aliens of other territories rose in significance as the
emblem of Aotearoa/New Zealand as a political entity. As such, the penetrability of the male
body to the necessarily alien prostitute was a politicised act in its own right, separate from
debates over morality and military fitness.

Schmitt concludes in The concept of the political that warfare cannot be outlawed, while
individuals can, in which case they manifest as enemies of the state (Schmitt, 2007). The
principle of this type of scapegoating, or deflection, can be used to explain the vehemence
directed at Rout by fellow New Zealanders and the ban placed upon the publication of
information concerning her by the New Zealand state. In a later work, Schmitt’s 1945 ‘The
international crime of the war of aggression and the principle “nullum crimen, nulla poena sine
lege”’, the legal theorist argues that atrocities like the war crimes committed during WWII also
position the perpetrator ‘outside the law … making him or her into an outlaw’ (Schmitt, 2011,
p. 128). Thus, for Schmitt, wartime ‘atrocities in a specific sense’, specific in that they are extra-
military actions, exist outside of the political (Schmitt, 2011, p. 127). It is possible to see in the
subjection of the soldier self to infection through engaging in vice, an extra-military atrocity
on a smaller scale during the earlier period spanned by WWI. Schmitt’s interpretation thus
provides a framework for understanding sexually active soldiers as outlaws alongside pacifists,
differentiated only in their respective adherence or otherwise to the gender norms of colonial
masculinity and the ongoing tropes of imperial conquest. However, while men who refused to
enlist for service were simultaneously posited outside of manhood and outside of the state in
Aotearoa/New Zealand and treated directly as enemies, it was Rout who became the enemy
of the state on the sexually active soldier’s behalf. Aotearoa/New Zealand did not turn against
its soldiers when it turned against Rout. In response to the exclusively masculine silhouettes
inhabiting Schmitt’s political expositions, as Derrida (2005) explains, the question is asked,
what if the woman were the absolute partisan? And what if she were the absolute enemy of this theory of the
absolute enemy, the spectacle of hostility to be conjured up for the sake of sworn brothers, or the other of the
absolute enemy who has become the absolute enemy that would not even be recognised in a regular war? (p.
157).

Rout becomes Derrida–Schmitt’s ‘spectre of hostility’, sacrificed for enduring democratic
ideals gluing together otherwise heterogeneous Imperial, Allied, or New Zealand brothers.
From this perspective, the terrorising plague of venereal disease and the prostitutes heralded as spreading the disease become an enemy beyond recognition.

Conclusion

Ettie Rout was a contentious figure in Aotearoa/New Zealand’s history because she strode against the state to lead her own Volunteer Sisterhood during WWI. She was also a contentious figure with regard to women reformers who believed in the purity of womanhood as the moral guardians of home and hearth. In both cases, Rout can be seen to have been at war with the New Zealand nation, both in her disregard for the rulings of the New Zealand state and in her refusal to toe the line with regard to colonial paradigms for acceptable gendered reform. But we see in the work of Derrida, Schmitt, and Wollstonecraft evidence of the paradigm that requires of women that they be both participants in the establishment of fraternal bonds and enemies perpetually poised to overthrow such fraternal bonds. While Rout was silenced within local media, disrespected by members of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and derided by the nation’s prime minister, she was esteemed by the New Zealand soldiers she sought to protect. An Australian war veteran later mused, with regard to Rout’s treatment, how it may be ‘a fine thing to have the physical courage to go to war for an ideal’ when supported by your country, ‘[b]ut it is splendid beyond words to have the moral courage – the fortitude to do the same thing in the face of being lied about, discredited, slandered and opposed’ (as cited in Tolerton, 1992, p. 15). We might presume that Rout was appreciated equally by the prostitutes who catered for ANZAC soldiers as, despite presumptions to the contrary, men were also capable of spreading the disease, and prophylaxis was as likely to protect a clean prostitute as it was a clean soldier. In promoting Madame Yvonne’s brothel, she invariably also brought in additional business for the prostitutes in Madame Yvonne’s employ. Given the high regard in which soldiers held Rout, we might infer that an individual woman was able to participate as a female brother of New Zealand forces during WWI, while the spectre of such was necessarily deemed hostile by the New Zealand state.

Women may be the enemy to fraternal paradigms, and thus the enemy of politics and democracy, but Rout was already positioned as a sister of the state as an enfranchised New Zealand woman at a time when it remained unclear how exactly women would participate in the political life of the community of brothers. Rout in part negotiated a place for herself and other women at war through recourse to the same gendered trope that had been affiliated with women’s early enfranchisement in Aotearoa/New Zealand—the colonial helpmeet. As a colonial helpmeet, it was her job to join New Zealand men on the new colonial frontier of world war. But as Derrida (2005) so thoroughly demonstrated in The politics of friendship, the omission of women from the genealogy of ‘friendship’ is not coincidental. Women are positioned as enemy as a means of maintaining the internal coherency of the polis. A polis at war, moreover, required Derrida–Schmitt’s spectre of hostility. Where Rout stumbled in her presentation of female-gendered brotherhood was in her attempt to accord French prostitutes the same status of female brother during war years that she herself embraced. In attempting to remove the risk of venereal disease, Rout not only enabled sexual vice to take place without individual repercussion but also elevated prostitutes into the fraternity of democratic brotherhood during the exact years that Aotearoa/New Zealand most needed them to remain its collective enemies.
Dr NADIA GUSH specialises in New Zealand women’s and cultural history. She is an Honorary Research Associate at the University of Waikato and the editor of the New Zealand Journal of Public History.

Notes

1 In A lifetime of campaigning, Tolerton (2001) observes that Rout ‘presaged many of the ideas which people live by today’, living through ‘many movements of the twentieth century – from socialism to safe sex’ (p. 96).
2 The New Thought movement was concerned with physical healing and financial growth through the power of thought and participated in contemporary debates concerning the virtues of female spirituality, male rationality, and the responsibility of women with regard to ‘animalistic’ bodily desires.
3 ‘Demi-semi’ is used by Rout to indicate the insignificance of such political purposes.
4 While small contingents of nurses did leave Aotearoa/New Zealand with state support during the years 1915–1919, Rout was not one of them.
5 As Annabel Cooper (1994) observes, Rout ‘gate-crashed’ suffrage feminists’ platform for public acceptance (pp. 106–108).
6 Even New Women novelists struggled to depict prostitutes in a good light (Liggins, 2003).

References


‘Utter abhorrence’: Miss Rout condemned. (1918, March 19). *Ashburton Guardian*. 